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A PAPER READ BEFORE THE AMERICAN SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION, AT NEW YORK,
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fed upon, until the working man or woman is led to the nutriment which will secure a larger and better mental growth. Few mortals possess such a natural endowment of genius as shall enable them to pass the limits of previous human discovery in invention, without a precise knowledge of the results and details already recorded in the newest treatises. In a great library, embracing within its extreme folds not only the mildest efforts of the novelist with "strictly moral principles," but the highest achievements of human wisdom and scholarship, it would seem that any mortal seeking entertainment, or learning, or wisdom from books might obtain his object. Any one who has observed carefully the masses of people who pour into the great free libraries of the English cities and of Boston, will not have failed to perceive the ardent desire manifested by all classes of borrowers to obtain the books of which they are in pursuit, and, if these should have been previously loaned, the patient waiting for some other book which shall satisfy their desires. No power of moral suasion can ever induce people to read what they do not wish to read. If they require fiction they will have it; if not afforded by the free lending library they will go elsewhere to obtain it, and possibly to collections not made with any special reference to the public morals. In libraries supported by the public funds, and for which each individual has been taxed either directly or indirectly, all classes, not vicious, are entitled to find the books fitted to their condition. Practically, it is seen that classes which are vicious, but not thieves or incapable of any trust, read books of good or fair moral principle, take good care of them, and return them safely, — with what improvement or tendency to a better life, no one can know; but any intellectual exercise, or even employment of time, not tending to the continuance of vice, must in such cases be an absolute good, and tend to beneficial results. But this remark only applies to the lowest order of intellects or morals reached by the free library. In appearance and conduct in public, the members of these classes are not separated from, or recognized by, the respectable and blameless men, women, and children, who frequent the reading and distributing halls. However debarred and socially ostracized, there is one place, not a church, where they can go, and behaving with the same decorum, sit upon the same seats, and be recognized as apparently members in good standing of the great society of letters, — as much so as the large majority of the regular frequenters whose appearance and character may be felt to be not entirely or forever beyond the reach of their own ability to attain. This presents one extreme of the picture. The other may be found in the workers, not only for their day and generation, but for the untold and unknown future, who are not only seeking to reach to the utmost limit of everything knowable in their selected vo-

cation, but are also striving to use the wisdom, knowledge, and progress of the ages as stepping-stones or pathways to further increase and development of principles and knowledge, and to add to culture and civilization by extending the breadth and depth of what is known for the advantage and advancement of future scholars and pioneers. The perfect library is the school after the school, — the college after the college, the great free literary institute of universal application and observance. No intellect too feeble to receive sustenance therefrom, and none so vigorous as not to require its help. For the intermediate class, composed of the great multitude of readers, the library affords entertainment, novelty, or instruction. Each finds the want supplied, and every motive to intelligent or intellectual progress receives sustenance and impulsion. It extends its helping hand to lead the whole community along the pathway of culture and civilization.

VIII. Economists differ as to the conditions which indicate a public necessity; but if the term is applicable to any form of charity or benevolence not devoted to the relief of physical suffering, or to the institutions which protect human property and life, it would seem as if the experience of this generation had crystallized this new organization into a form which society must hereafter recognize as an essential ingredient of any intelligently governed community. In cities enjoying a large use of the free lending library, it would be difficult to draw the line across the points where exceeding convenience terminates and absolute necessity begins. The limit of perfect freedom in use is the safety and proper treatment of the books placed broadcast in the hands of borrowers. This limit is within the reach of every community; it can impose its own laws for security to its property, according to the nature and character of its population. It can either trust to the sense of honor of every borrower, or it may require the guaranty of responsible citizens, or it may call for a pecuniary deposit to insure the prompt and safe return of its books to their shelves. One is now slow to believe that a free lending library is impossible in any large gathering of population in one vicinity.

To this test of practical results, derived directly from the books themselves, there should be added the influences which emanate from the institution as a centre of light and progress. To the care and supervision of the books must be appointed men of wide culture; no knowledge is too minute or too general not to find appropriate use in bibliothecal administration. Among the most useful functions of an accomplished librarian is, the assistance to be personally given to the seeker after knowledge, in the ready direction to the latest text-books and authorities, and in answering the innumerable questions covering the multiform phases of human curiosity or of scientific research. This

legitimate condition will naturally attract with increasing frequency and usefulness to the library, as to the recognized cyclopædia of past and present popular and scientific knowledge, all those who require help from books or brains.

It may appear that this statement of progress is too simple and apparently inconsequential; yet the detail is necessary to indicate what has been approximately accomplished. What are unquestionable truisms, nevertheless, mark in their appropriate places the steps which have been taken forward, with the reasons which encouraged the venture. Simplicity and natural arrangement lead to their logical results. The new condition of the library evolved itself gradually with continually widening aim, from its first inception, until it has attained its present growth and power.

In this connection, in order not only to understand the relations of the library to the community, however small the collection of books may be, but to comprehend the subjects upon which the larger number of people depend for amusement or progress, it becomes essentially important that the statistics of the uses of the library should be printed. One needs to know the classes of books of which the library is constituted, the number of each class, and the uses in proportion to the borrowers. Mere statistics are neglected very largely by libraries in their printed reports, especially in this country. The necessity of employing a force sufficient for all the purposes of the institution is not comprehended, — provision in most cases simply being made for the cataloguing and the delivery of the books. But in order to recognize the social facts, one must know what the library contributes to the conditions under which it is administered.

I regret to say that the classification of subjects which was originally established in the English free lending libraries, was too diffuse in generals and not sufficiently minute in particulars; so that when comparisons are instituted between the results of that system and our own, we fail to arrive at the details necessary for exact comparison. The classes of books in the Manchester Free Library are included under six heads with twenty-five subdivisions; the five principal divisions being respectively Theology and Philosophy; History and Biography; Politics and Commerce; Sciences and Arts; Literature and Polygraphy. Under the head of history is embraced also the large subject of the narratives of voyages and travels. Under the head of literature and polygraphy, are enumerated the subjects really in principal demand; — general treatises on literature and literary miscellanies, linguistics, poetry and prose fiction, oratory, epistolography, bibliography, polygraphy. In the Liverpool library the classes number fifteen. Among them are, history and biography; geography, voyages and travels; poetry and the drama;

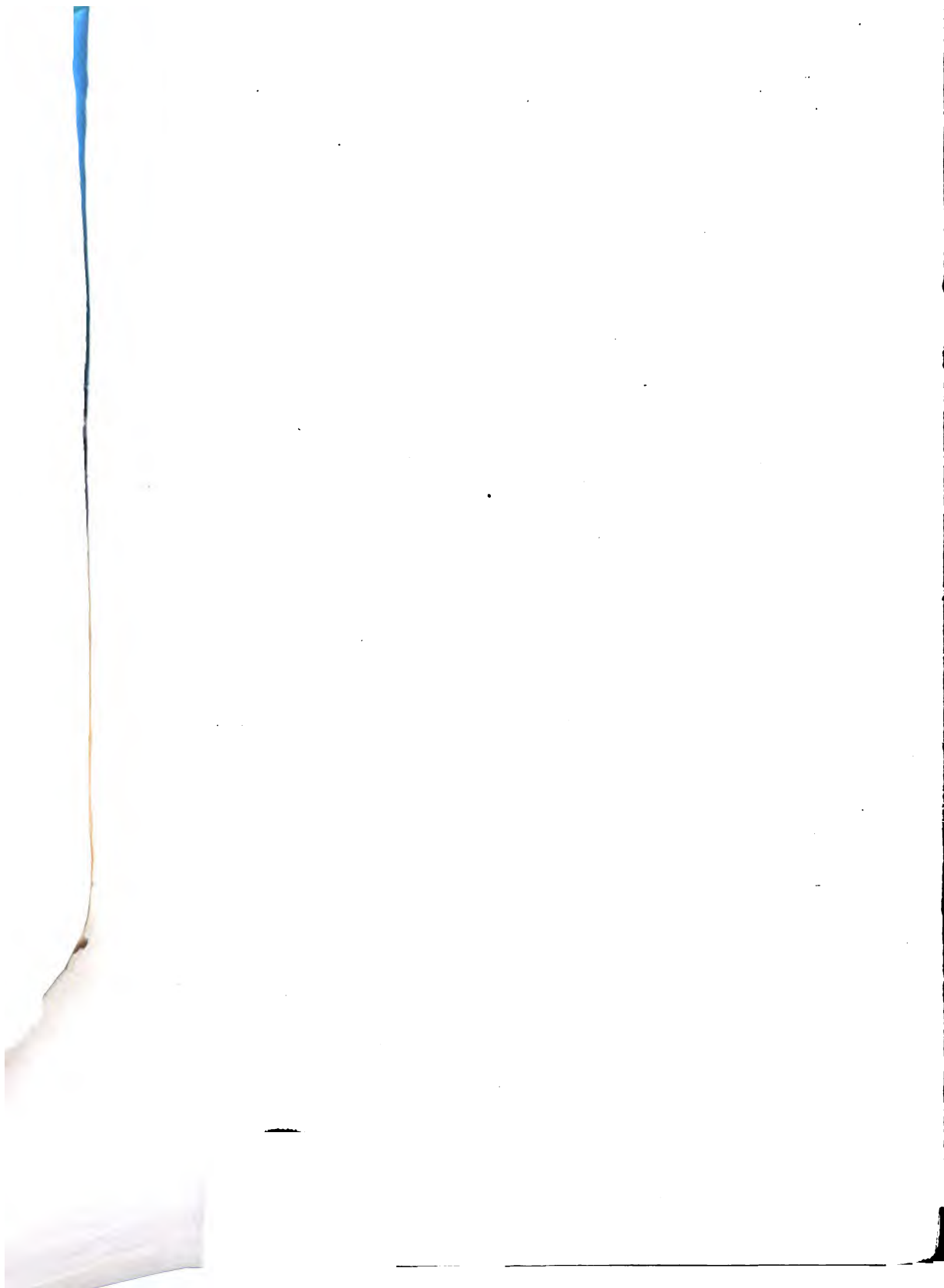
novels and romances ; heraldry, encyclopædias, gazetteers, dictionaries and other works of reference ; and classical literature ; a clearer and more exact arrangement. In the Bolton library, the subdivision is still further diminished to eleven heads, which is certainly an improvement on the previous classifications, and approaches more nearly the practical form used in the United States. In this library, history, biography, voyages and travels, novels and romances, poetry and the drama, form separate classes, which more clearly indicate the tastes and educational pursuits of the community in these respects, than is the case in the two older libraries. In the popular branch of the Boston Public Library, the classification adopted by the accomplished bibliographer, Professor Jewett, and which has been found sufficiently indicative of the uses of the library, comprises nine heads, which include in distinct divisions prose fiction, biography, travels and voyages, American history and politics, foreign history and politics, French, German, and Italian books. The divisions of subjects embraced in the great reference as well as lending library in the Bates Hall, are arranged upon a system peculiar to this institution, and are more numerous, as enumerating distinctly the different ramifications of science, art, and literary knowledge.

It is obvious that in comparing the results of the use of the three great lending libraries of the world, Manchester, Liverpool, and Boston, or in examining the classification and numbers of books in circulation in Europe and America, one fails to arrive at the facts which are needed by every student of social progress in connection with the influences developed by the library, or as adapted to the character of the population to which its charity is ministered. Uniformity of detail should be entirely practicable in the statistics of libraries, and it is hoped that by joint agreement in Europe and this country, a classification may be adopted which shall yield all the facts needed, in a simple and practical form, and within the administrative capabilities of the smaller as well as the larger libraries. With the libraries that have had their classification established for years, it will be difficult, and perhaps impracticable to adopt a new system of arrangement ; but in these cases, it is not impossible, while continuing their previous numerations, to subdivide in their statistics the most important and popular classes of books circulated ; so that while the whole circulation of the particular heading shall be given, the numbers of each subject embraced in the aggregate shall also be stated. The free library is the barometer of the taste and culture of its readers, and the weight or lightness of their intellectual atmosphere makes its sure and incisive register in the statistics of its use. When in one great library, under one head, are included literature and literary miscellanies, poetry and prose fiction, oratory, epistolography, bibliography, and polygraphy, — while in

10 SOME CONCLUSIONS RELATIVE TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

another they are found in almost as many separate divisions, how can any intelligent comparison be made of the uses of these libraries in their relations to their community, or of the educational purposes which they serve? In the continuous movement or development of this new necessity of modern civilization, it may naturally be expected that a common system may be agreed upon by representatives of the free lending libraries in this country and in Europe, which shall indicate to the student of social progress the extending results of each year's use or work.

In examining the position of a library, it must be remembered that however vast the collection of books in separate institutions, no institution may contain all the works which have been printed. The advantage of modern collections consists mainly in their practical value, — as embracing in proportion to their contents a larger number of books desired by the great number of readers. One cannot but smile when Professor Mommsen finds such a deficiency in a library of 600,000 volumes at Berlin that he is compelled to resort to the 800,000 volumes of Munich; but the printed statement does not tell us in what the deficiencies consist, nor to what end the expenditures for modern books have been devoted, nor what the system of growth of each library has been during the past twenty-five years. To any one familiar with the contents of the shelves of the large libraries of Europe, and cognizant of the masses of didactic and polemic theology, as well as of the forgotten and useless books of more than four centuries of printing, it is sufficiently obvious that the number of volumes does not indicate or even approximate to the real worth or value of a library. That collection of books is the most important and valuable which contributes the largest amount of knowledge and information needed to the progress of the century in science, art, and general civilization.



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